

DUC CO

Duc Co, a former US Special Forces - South Vietnamese military camp, is situated in the sparsely populated western Central Highlands, about 40 road miles southwest of Pleiku, and 9 miles east of the Cambodian border (see 1:250,000 map). The camp was evacuated by the South Vietnamese in September 1972 and has been partially destroyed.

For years NVA forces and materiel have channeled through this area into South Vietnam. Ground observation of Communist movement was not effective from Duc Co, because of the camp's valley location and dense vegetation cover except along the roads. Before its evacuation, Duc Co had been an outpost in the South Vietnamese border net monitoring infiltration and was the site of a resettlement camp. The outpost, now within Communist-controlled territory, is located astride a principal armor approach from Cambodia along Route 19 and is north of the nearby major NVA infiltration corridors lying between the Ia Drang Valley and Plei Mei, 25 air miles to the southeast (see 1:100,000 map).

Travel to Duc Co from Pleiku may be by air or by road. The 3,600' x 59' northeast-southwest aligned light duty steel matting runway -- with a 300 foot macadam overrun at each end -- was formerly capable of landing C-7A's, C-123's, and lightly loaded C-130's. The runway was cratered in late 1972 although damage was not extensive and some craters have been filled; helicopters and light fixed-wing aircraft should be able to use the airfield. Repairs should not be difficult if larger fixed-wing aircraft are required. No navigational facilities are present.

Air travel to Duc Co early in the day may be precluded several days a month at any time of year by dense early morning fog that does not dissipate until mid- or late-morning. Air access may also be prevented during the wet season, late May to October, by low-lying clouds obscuring the surrounding terrain and persisting for several days at a time.

The approximately 40 miles from Pleiku to Duc Co may take as long as 3-1/2 to 4 hours to drive because of extensive "potholing" along the route. Route 19 extending southwestward from Pleiku via Thanh An, the district headquarters and closest reported Vietnamese settlement, is macadamized to a road junction about 6 miles east of Duc Co and is normally passable throughout the year. The laterite-surfaced stretch of Route 19 that extends through Duc Co into Cambodia is also generally usable throughout the year. The route may wash out, however, during heavy rainstorms at several points where it winds through higher ground just west of Thanh An; bypassing these points would be difficult. At least one bridge in this sector was partially out in late 1972 and was being bypassed, although it could be easily repaired. No other roads or tracks in the vicinity of Duc Co have an all-weather capability.

Duc Co is sited at 1,234 feet elevation in a broad valley on a rolling plateau that appears deceptively flat. Natural vegetation is comprised of varying mixes of grasses, shrubs, and low trees -- not over 20 feet tall -- that grow in dense concentrations away from the roads, reducing fields of observation. Dense bamboo thickets combined with grasses, shrubs, and intertwining vines impede movement in the numerous stream gullies but

enhance concealment; the often steep streambanks make fording more difficult.

Forested hills north and south of Duc Co restrict extended fields of view. The forest vegetation, which provides excellent concealment for personnel moving through the area from either ground or air observation, comprises trees reportedly up to about 40 feet tall. The canopy is not continuous, however, and where sunlight breaks through to the forest floor the mixed undergrowth of shrubs, vines, and grasses becomes thicker. Away from the immediate vicinity of Duc Co trees may be much taller, depending upon terrain elevation and exposure to wind-bearing rains; trees in the broadleaf evergreen forests that are found throughout the Vietnam highlands grow to as much as 125 feet.

There are no wetland rice paddies in the Duc Co region. Most slash-and-burn plots (dry crop fields), for cultivation of dryland rice and maize, are now abandoned and overgrown. Several abandoned plantations located near Duc Co are partially overgrown with brush and trees. Abandoned rubber plantations are found along Route 568 running north from Route 19 and northeast of Duc Co (see 1:100,000 map); other abandoned plantations are south of Monkey Hill (Hill 451), located southwest of Duc Co (see Sketch Map).

Frequent and often heavy rains from May to October may reduce visibility and limit observation, restrict use of roads and trails, and cause local flooding of streams and low-lying areas. Maximum rainfall occurs from June through September when 13 inches or more is received each month. Low-lying clouds and torrential showers are characteristic

during these months. Almost daily showers, usually starting in early to mid-afternoon, frequently last 3 to 5 hours; severe thunderstorms, especially common in April and May, develop several or more days a month through October and they often disrupt radio communications for 2 to 3 hours.

Little rain -- mostly a brief shower or two -- is recorded from November through March. Perhaps the most uncomfortable feature of the dry season are the clouds of red dust that become especially thick when churned up by heavy road traffic. Dusty road conditions may also occur during brief dry periods in the rainy season.

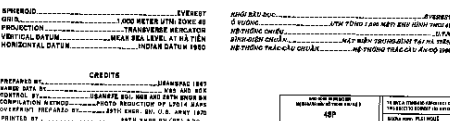
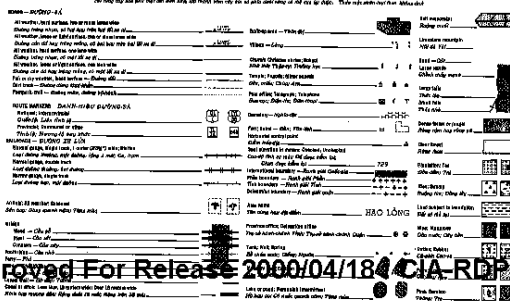
Temperatures are cooler in the western Central Highlands than at Saigon, with daytime highs in the mid-80's for much of the year. Night-time temperatures commonly dip into the lower 60's (December-February), and occasionally even lower; March and April record the highest temperatures when they frequently reach the lower 90's.

The Duc Co area is now virtually depopulated following the evacuation of the border area with the fall of Duc Co in September 1972. However, the indigenous Montagnards of the Jarai tribe, who previously lived in clustered villages nearby, may have begun returning to their land since last fall. Some small isolated villages in the nearby highlands also may have been continuously occupied. The Jarai previously were excellent sources of information concerning the Viet Cong and NVA activities in the area, because they resented being impressed into service as porters for the Viet Cong or being levied for food.

Personnel at Duc Co should be aware of serious health and safety hazards. An especially virulent form of malaria is found in this area,

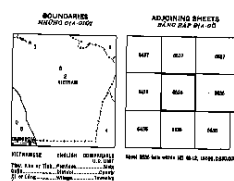
and prophylactic dosages of malaria suppressants begun before entry into Duc Co are necessary. Movement off established roads is extremely hazardous because of numerous randomly placed mines and duds, and occasional booby traps, found throughout this area; road shoulders are especially dangerous as these were favorite locations for mine emplacement. Two reported minefields northwest of the Duc Co airstrip, are indicated on the Sketch Map, although their precise areal extent and current status are unknown. An anti-tank minefield has also been reported west of Duc Co; the ARVN is believed to have a record of this minefield.

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GLOSSARY — COUNTRY

Chie. Cde. _____
H. _____
Ph. _____
_____ **Primary administrative**
_____ **Attle**
_____ **Secondary administrative**

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